

House Committee on Natural Resources,
Subcommittee on Indian, Insular and Alaska Native Affairs

Congresswoman Jaime Herrera Beutler
April 26, 2018

Legislative Hearing: H.R. 5317

Thank you Chairman LaMalfa, Ranking Member Torres, and members of the committee for the opportunity to testify today about my bill, H.R. 5317.

This bill repeals an antiquated 19th century prohibition – from 1834, to be exact – of distilleries on tribal lands. This prohibition was enacted at a time when the federal government took a more paternalistic stance with the Indian tribes. While many of the provisions in the larger statute have since been repealed, somehow the distillery provision remains.

This issue came to my attention when the Chehalis Tribe from my home in Southwest Washington began the permitting process for a new economic development project to be constructed on reservation land, which includes the construction and operation of a distillery. Through the process, they learned about the 1834 law from Bureau of Indian Affairs who suggested that the Tribe move the project off Indian land - or seek a legislative remedy.

I am pleased to put this bill forward to help place Indian tribes on equal footing with non-tribal citizens by allowing them to pursue the same economic opportunities as everyone else. This repeal enables tribes to diversify their economic investments and helps provide jobs for not just tribes, but also neighboring communities. This is a matter of fairness; Washington, D.C. shouldn't be in the business of telling Indian country it cannot engage in a business that's allowed everywhere else and is actually helping many neighboring areas revitalize their local economies.

While this bill provides additional opportunities for tribes, it does not provide special treatment. Tribes would still be required to follow state and federal liquor laws and regulations, just as they currently do for breweries.

I also have a letter of support for this bill from the National Congress of American Indians I would like to submit for the record.

With these brief remarks, I want to thank the committee and introduce the Chairman of the Chehalis Tribe, the Honorable, Harry Pickernell. I am pleased to have him here today. Any day that Congress is listening to voices from Southwest Washington is a good day in my book.